



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

OBSERVATIONS *on the* ROMANTIC HISTORY *of* IRELAND.

*By the Rev. EDWARD LEDWICH, L. L. B. M. R. I. A. and
F. A. S. of London and Scotland.*

WHEN we review the remote histories of England, Scotland and Ireland, and find names and facts delivered with unhesitating confidence and chronological accuracy, it seems, at first sight, an unreasonable degree of scepticism to withhold our assent from them, or question their authenticity; and yet they are but specious delusions, and some of the numberless vagaries of the human mind.

Read October
22, 1791.

To the unsuspecting candour of mankind these plausible fables must always appear genuine records, nor can their magic influence be removed but by the severe scrutiny of learning and criticism. A nation emerging from incivility and ignorance reluctantly gives up the fictions of poets and genealogists, because they are the only vouchers for antient ancestry, and the only evidences of extinct national honour. But when that nation arrives at higher degrees of improvement and polish, these phantoms vanish, and individuals

duals and nations seek for honour and unfading remembrance by personal desert and patriotic exertion.

*Fama manet facti : posito velamine currunt :
Et memorem famam, quod bene cessit, habet.*

BRITONS, at this day, arrogate no pride from being descended from Trojans, and yet it is a curious and no useless speculation to investigate the origin of that notion, for its developement and detection are strong and flattering proofs of the good sense and extensive erudition of the present age. Mr. Warton has successfully * instituted such an inquiry into the fabulous Antiquities of England : Nor are the principles he lays down and the arguments he uses less applicable to Ireland, for the same spirit of romantic fiction pervades the early history of each country. Encouraged, therefore, by his example, and countenanced by his respectable authority, I shall endeavour to deduce our Bardic tales and historical romances from sources which he has happily opened. How imperfect soever these observations may be, some of them, perhaps the whole, may suggest to superior abilities a more perfect plan for future execution. If they in the least contribute to remove vulgar errors, I shall fully attain the object of my wishes.

WHEN the Saracens entered Spain in the beginning of the eighth century, with the revival of Greek literature they introduced a knowledge of the sciences and arts before but little studied, in many places not heard of, in Western Europe. From
the

* History of English Poetry, Vol. I. Diss. 1.

the earliest ages the Arabians cultivated magic : they extolled their intimate acquaintance with the occult qualities of bodies, and their power of conferring them where wanting. Their skill in metallurgy, in optics, in vitrification, in precious stones and medicine, supported their high claims, and astonished and confounded the incredulous. Nor were they less distinguished for a vein of romantic fiction : here they displayed an exuberance of fancy in the creation of ideal personages, in the wildness and variety of their adventures, and in the extravagance of their fables, all springing from original modes of thinking and from their peculiar philosophy. A brilliancy of imagination and pomp of expression at once captivated and delighted the reader.

OUR western bards quickly caught the pleasing contagion : the genial warmth of oriental fiction enlivened their songs : the monotonous and dismal tales of blood and slaughter were succeeded by more amusing and sprightly relations ; by the heroic achievements of gallantry, or the bland occupations of love : all these wrought up with Arabian inventions, and sustained by Arabian philosophy are visible, not only in our ancient history and hagiography, but in those of every other country in the middle ages. I shall now proceed to confirm what has been advanced, from our mythologic story and the lives of our saints.

SPAIN, the * centre of oriental fabling, soon after the Saracenic invasion, enjoyed a celebrity above that of any other European nation. The Irish bards in consequence esteemed it a matter

* Warton, *sup.*

ter of the greatest importance to exhibit a clear deduction of their countrymen from thence, and their close attention to this point carried them, as will be seen, into many absurd, incredible, and puerile excesses. They * tell us three Spanish fishermen arrived here before the flood, and that soon after that awful event, the Fomhoraigh, or Africans, (by whom must be understood the Saracens) subdued the † isle, and others from the continent of Africa frequently visited it, and that it was finally colonized ‡ by Milesius, a Spaniard. This fiction is in Nennius, who is said to have written A. D. 858, though I think there are internal proofs in his work of his age being much later. But let it be as is stated, we need not wonder at the adoption of romantic fiction so early here, when we reflect that Ireland was then the § mart of learning to the Western World, and that hither resorted crowds from the remotest countries for greater advancement in piety and more perfect instruction in letters. Nennius relates, that the Milesians, in their voyage from Spain to this isle, saw a tower of glass in the middle of the ocean, which, endeavouring to take, they were drowned in the attempt. This tower is a sure mark of an oriental fancy: It is similar to the tower of glass built by ¶ Ptolemy, and Boyardo's wall of glass made by an African magician; and the pillars of Hercules at Cape Finisterre, erected on magical looking-glasses, all betraying their foundation in Arabian fable and Arabian philosophy.

THE

* Keating, pag. 18—46. † Keating, pag. 11. ‡ Waræi Disq. c. 2. Keating, sup.

§ Antiquities of Ireland, pag. 171. Edit. Dubl. 1790. ¶ Warton, sup. Sect. 15.

THE Milesians, in a starry winter night, discovered Ireland from the * tower of Brigantia in Galicia by the help of a telescope. This fiction could not be older than the thirteenth century, probably much more recent. Roger Bacon † affirms Julius Cæsar, before he invaded Britain, viewed with a telescope her shores and harbours.

THE Milesians, when they landed in Ireland, had various battles with the Tuatha de Danans, a nation of ‡ magicians and enchanters, whom at length they subdued by superior skill and bravery.

IN § Ossian's combat of Osgar and Illan, a beautiful damsel complains, that Illan, eldest son of the king of Spain, pursued her, and threatened wounds and destruction to the Fians: "wherever he goes," adds she, "to the east or west, or to the four quarters of the world, his sharp-edged weapon makes every foe yield the victory." The dress and arms of Illan are then described: He had a coat of mail, a vizor polished and set with precious stones, his garments were of rich satin, tied with silken strings. This romantic tale bespeaks its age not to be anterior to the fifteenth century. Were I to mention the Clanna Badisgaine, or Biscayan colony, the Liafail, or magical stone, the Gai Bulg, or forcerer's spear, the magical helmet, and numberless other particulars in Irish romantic story, relating to Spain, to the occult qualities of bodies, to conjuration and enchantment, derived from Arabic ideas and Arabic

VOL. IV.

(D)

philosophy,

* Keatings, pag. 44.

† Warton, sup.

‡ Keatings, pag. 55.

§ Trans. of the Roy. Irish Acad. vol. I. pag. 74.

philosophy, I should extend these observations to an unreasonable length. The foregoing specimen will sufficiently point out their origin.

IN the legends of our saints the same romantic fabling as in our history abounds, and proceeds from the same source. No one but a virgin could use the * magic girdle of St. Colman. St. Cuthbert's zone † cures many diseases. An Irish prince complains to St. Gerald, that an huge rock, situated in the midst of a river, impeded its navigation, and intreats him to remove it: the saint throws a ‡ wonderful stone, which he held in his hand, on it, and instantly it splits in pieces. At another time he puts the same stone into the mouth of a dead man and he revives. St. Kieran, St. Fechin, and St. Ænd, are conveyed as safely over the ocean, lakes and rivers, on stones as in ships. The mystical and wondrous power of stones mark the oriental complexion of our spiritual romances, and are derived from the school of Eastern philosophy.

MR. WARTON remarks, that romantic fabling was early cultivated in Armorica and in Wales; and of this he alleges numerous and incontestible proofs. To which I may add, that through these channels it must have soon reached Ireland. For this country professed a religion & perfectly corresponding with the British, which, through every age, cemented the inhabitants of both islands in the bonds of fraternal regard, so that the connection between Ireland, Cornwall, and Wales, was very intimate. Marc,
a Cornish

* Colgan, Act. Sanct. pag. 246.

† Colgan, sup. pag. 730.

‡ Colgan, sup. pag. 600.

§ Antiquities of Ireland, pag. 66—369.

a Cornish king, married La Bel Ifod, the monarch of Ireland's * daughter. Constantine, another king, became a monk in the abbey of Ratheny in Westmeath. Edwal ap Meiric, Iago ap Edwal, and Conal ap Iago, Welch princes, were espoused in Ireland. "The people of Cornwall," says Camden, "have always borne such veneration for Irish saints, who retired there, that almost all their towns have been consecrated to their memory."

ST. PATRICK is born in † Taburnia in Cornwall, his mother is Concheffa, a French woman of Tours. Others make him a native of Airmuirc, or Armorica. From this region he and his sister Lupita are carried away by Irish pirates. On his return from Rome he preaches in Cornwall; and ‡ Fingar and other Irish saints travel to Armorica and Cornwall. In a § council held by St. Patrick, all the unconverted Irish are baptised, and so violent a religious paroxysm seizes them, that thirty thousand, divided into three bodies, begin a pilgrimage with the saint's benediction to Rome and Jerusalem, and other parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. Here is a palpable forgery, similar to one mentioned by Mr. Warton, calculated to countenance the crusades, and determines the date of this fiction to the twelfth century. The learned Jesuit, Bollandus, from a judicious and critical examination of our legends, (well worth perusal) pronounces their fabrication to be ¶ about the twelfth century.

(D 2)

OUR

* Hanmer's Chronicle, p. 9.

† Uffer. Primord. p. 819.

‡ Uffer supra.

§ Uffer p. 952.

¶ Vix ullas enim Sanctorum Hibernicorum vitas habemus in manibus, quas possumus credere sexcentis annis vetustiores esse. Act. Sanct. ad 16 Mart. p. 581.

OUR romantic history is much later ; almost every page in * Keating supplies new proofs. Thus he informs us, “ when Milefius arrived in Spain he found the Spaniards in the most deplorable circumstances, over-run by Goths, who with other foreigners ransacked the whole country. He summoned all his Gadelians, defeated the Goths in fifty-four battles, and quite drove them out of the kingdom.” This perverted piece of history evidently refers to the expulsion of the Saracens from Spain in the beginning of the sixteenth century. It admits of the clearest proof, that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were the ages fruitful in supposititious writings. In these periods the celebrated literary impostures of Berosus, Philo, Cato, Hector Boethius and others appeared. Trithemius, an ecclesiastic of some learning in the fifteenth century, gives a plausible list of ideal French princes from their first departure from Troy, which he assures us was taken from an ancient author named Hunibald. Frederic, elector of Saxony, writ to Trithemius, requesting Hunibald might be sent to him, but Trithemius had no way to screen his forgery and evade a compliance, but by saying, he was not in possession of the MS. having changed his residence from Hitzkau to Wurtzburg, so that it was justly concluded, “ Que cet auteur pretendu est de la propre fabrique de Tritheme.” †

WHOEVER will consult Florian del Campo, Tarapha, Pedro Mexia, Pineda, and other Spanish chroniclers, will quickly perceive that they

* Supra, p. 43.

† Recueil de div. pieces par Leibniz, Clarke, &c. tom. II. p. 287.

they supplied the * later bar s and Keating with materials for enlarging the Milesian tale, which they adorned with poetical scraps and inventions of their own. Of sound judgment, unwarping by false patriotism or national prejudice, the learned Bartholine desires his readers to be extremely † cautious in studying the Icelandic historians, and not to be imposed on by their Fornum Bokum, or old books, nor by their Fornum Sagum, or antient traditions, for he found both stuffed with absurdities and fictions. Let us with the same caution examine our senachies, else we may embrace puerile stories and idle fictions, rivalling the Fornum Bokum or Fornum Sagum of Iceland.

WHAT a deplorable instance then is it of mental debility and misapplied erudition to defend fictions, confessed to be such by those who record them? Nennius, though he gives us the Milesian tale, and is the oldest relater of it, yet tells us, there was no certain history of the † origin of the Scots. How can the effect of this candid confession be evaded? He consulted ——— peritissimos Scotorum ——— the most skilful Irish Antiquaries, and they told him the story of Pharoah's son-in-law, his expulsion from Egypt, his travels through Africa to Spain, and from thence to Ireland, and all this two thousand years after the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red sea. If this was the state of Irish history in the ninth century, and such the materials for it, was time or inquiry likely to improve either, particularly

as

* O'Flaher. Ogyg. vind. p. 257.

† Plurimâ itaque cautelâ in libris veteribus Islandicis utendum est, neque abili protinus nobis imponi patiamur, &c. De contemp. Mort. p. 191.

‡ Nulla tamen certa historia originis Scotorum reperitur. Nenn. p. 102. Edit. Bertram.

as the * best critics assure us, there are no Irish MSS older than the tenth or eleventh century? But what establishes the veracity of Nennius, in declaring we had no history, is, that Gildas, who flourished almost three hundred years before him, assures † us, that if there were any national records, they were either burnt or carried away by enemies, for none appeared in the sixth century. Fordun makes the same complaint in his *Scotichronicon*: he cannot determine the times of the reigns of the Scottish kings between the two Ferguses: Why? Because there were ‡ no authentic memorials of them.

It was the uncertainty of tradition and the want of literary monuments that drove weak men to the § unreputable and disingenuous shift of forging authorities.

SUCH then seems to me the origin and grounds of Irish romantic history, a subject of little curiosity and less value, yet necessary to be thoroughly examined to be for ever exploded. In this enlightened age it can require no apology for exposing this wild chaos of absurdity and fable; as it stands at present it reflects no honour on our native country, nor can its annihilation in the least injure it. But a strenuous support of bardic tales, the offspring of licentious fancies in rude and ignorant ages,

* Asple's *Origin of Writing*, p. 116. Pinkerton's *Scotland*, vol. I.

† Quæ si qua fuerint, aut ignibus hostium exusta, aut civium exilii classe longius deportata, non compareant. *Gild. de excid. Brit.* p. 69.

‡ Quia ad plenum scripta non reperimus. *Scotochron.* l. 3. c. 2.

§ See Stillingfleet's *British Churches* on this subject, pref. and 5th chapter.

ages, would, in the eyes of foreigners, degrade our national understanding, and suggest how slow our advances have been in letters and civility.

ARE we then totally to reject Irish history and Irish antiquities as undeserving notice or investigation? To this I answer with confidence, that so far as the one is supported by authentic records and the other by existing monuments, they are as curious and interesting as those of any other country, not classical, or the seat of a great empire. The formation of the Irish alphabet; the etymology and analogy of the language; the state of our literature from the sixth to the ninth century; our round towers and stone-roofed crypts; the origin and progress of Christianity in this isle; our ancient laws and coins; our skill in metallurgy, and the lapidary's and goldsmith's arts, with the remains of our primitive superstition, all soliciting our attention and illustration by numberless monuments every where to be found, are topics that would abundantly exercise the ingenuity and erudition of the philologer, the grammarian, architect, theologian and antiquary.